

PSY 492-09
THE PSYCHOLOGY CAPSTONE – ONLINE EDITION

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30 – 3:45 p.m.
(see our course schedule for virtual class dates)

Instructor: Brian Bowdle

Office Hours: by appointment

Email: bowdleb@gvsu.edu

Cell Phone: (517) 881-7753

Course Description

The purpose of this capstone course is to explore different theories of human nature, the relationships among these theories, and their implications for personal insight and growth, for contemporary culture and its institutions, and for the future of our species. Throughout this course, we will also consider the proper scope, role, and conduct of psychological science. Our various explorations will revolve around the central theme of ***self and society***, and we will adopt a seminar format (guided student discussions as opposed to formal lectures) for most of our class meetings. This course is worth three credits.

Learning Objectives

Upon successfully completing this course, students should be able to (a) identify concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives in psychology, (b) describe the strengths and weaknesses of competing psychological perspectives, (c) determine whether and how competing perspectives can be integrated, (d) apply theories and basic research findings to real-world situations, (e) recognize sources of bias in psychological research, (f) appreciate interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions, and (g) write in a professional style.

Course Modality

This section of PSY 492 is an online offering. Here is what you need to know:

Blackboard. Our Blackboard website is an essential component of this course. In addition to serving as the platform for our virtual class meetings, Blackboard will be used to complete and submit all of our writing assignments. Class announcements, course documents, and grades will also be posted on this website. And I will be using Blackboard to send out emails to members of this class, which means that you should regularly check the messages on your GVSU student email account.

Virtual Class Meetings. This is a Tuesday/Thursday class, and – aside from six “movie weeks” this semester (see our course schedule) – we will be meeting synchronously on both days each week. Everyone is expected to attend on a regular basis.

We will use Blackboard Collaborate Ultra as the platform for our class meetings. You should have reliable access to high-speed internet and a device with both a webcam and a microphone in order to fully participate in these meetings. (If you have any concerns about these technological requirements, contact me so that we can discuss your options.)

To join a meeting, go to Blackboard and click the Virtual Classroom tab in the course menu. This will take you to the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra page. Once you are there, look for the day’s Class Session folder, open it, and click the Join Session button. This will take you to our meeting. Oh, and if you are asked for permission to turn on your camera and microphone, please allow for these options – I would prefer to be able to see and hear all of you during class!

I will not be recording any of our virtual class meetings.

Course Materials

Like most sections of PSY 492, this one relies heavily on a wide variety of readings. And we will also be watching and discussing a small number of films. These materials are described below to help you prepare for this course. The dates of all reading and film assignments are given in our course schedule.

Required Books. There are eight (yes, eight!) required books for this course, which are listed here in the order we will be reading them:

- Sigmund Freud (1930) – *Civilization and Its Discontents*
- B. F. Skinner (1948) – *Walden Two*
- Ernest Becker (1971) – *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (second edition)
- Ursula K. Le Guin (1971) – *The Lathe of Heaven*
- John R. Hibbing, Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Alford (2014) – *Predisposed*
- Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai (2015) – *Virtuous Violence*
- Pascal Boyer (2018) – *Minds Make Societies*
- Louisa Hall (2016) – *Speak*

Understanding the relationship between individual and collective processes ideally involves an interdisciplinary approach, and many of the above books come from outside of the field of psychology. Nevertheless, nearly all of them closely align with particular psychological perspectives on self and society. Our discussions and assignments will refer extensively to these books and, as you read each one, you should keep the following questions in mind:

- How does the author conceptualize human nature?
- How are the dynamics between the self and one's society (or civilization or culture) viewed from this psychological perspective?
- What are the potential moral, civic, and/or political implications of this perspective?
- Do you agree with the author's claims, and why or why not?
- How does this psychological perspective relate to previous perspectives we have explored?

In order to get the most out of these books, I encourage all of you to (1) **pace your reading of each of the texts**, with the aim of reading a chapter or two each day during the week or so prior to our first write-ups and discussions of the material; (2) **engage in a "mental dialogue" with the author as you read the text** – that is, actively question (rather than passively accept) each of the author's claims; and (3) **take notes as you progress through the text**, keeping track of your various reactions to and struggles with the material.

Additional Readings. Alongside the books listed above, a number of articles will be assigned throughout the semester to tie in with specific discussions and homework assignments. These articles should be treated as essential readings – they will serve to reify certain theoretical claims from the books, to update older ideas in light of newer empirical evidence, and to fill in important conceptual gaps between the psychological perspectives we will be considering. All such articles are available on Blackboard via the Additional Readings page.

Film Screenings. We will also be watching six films this semester and discussing them in relation to our various readings. These films are *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Woody Allen, 1989); *The Ballad of Narayama* (Keisuke Kinoshita, 1958); *It's Such a Beautiful Day* (Don Hertzfeldt, 2012); *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976); *Moolaadé* (Ousmane Sembene, 2004); and *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008). You can find all of these films on Blackboard via the Movie Library page, where I have embedded them as Panopto files. You should be able to play these films on a wide range of devices, but I do encourage you to use the biggest screen and the best speakers you can find.

When you look at our course schedule, you will see that we will not be having any virtual class meetings during the weeks these films are assigned. Under normal circumstances, there would be in-class screenings these weeks, but – given that we will be completely online this semester – it seems silly to

have us all gather together synchronously for this purpose when you can more easily watch each the movies I've uploaded to Blackboard on your own (and at your own pace).

Please note that the films assigned for this course are not your typical Hollywood productions – they exist more as provocations to thought than as mere entertainments, and you may find some of them disturbing in terms of the attitudes and behaviors they portray. But the field of psychology ideally covers the full range of human thought and activity, and I encourage you to approach each of these films with an open mind and a clinical eye.

Course Evaluation

The maximum number of points you can receive in this course is 100, and point totals will be translated into grades at the end of the semester using this scale:

93 – 100 points = A	73 – 76 points = C
90 – 92 points = A-	70 – 72 points = C-
87 – 89 points = B+	67 – 69 points = D+
83 – 86 points = B	63 – 66 points = D
80 – 82 points = B-	60 – 62 points = D-
77 – 79 points = C+	59 points or less = F

Your grade will be cumulatively determined by the following:

Peer-Responded Journal. During the second week of class, you will be assigned to a journal group consisting of yourself and two other members of the class, and your group will be given its own page on Blackboard. The online journaling that you will engage in with the members of your group is one of the most important components of this course, both pedagogically and grade-wise, and it is worth 40 points. Please read the following very carefully.

Eight times during the semester, you will submit a substantial (**600 words minimum, no maximum**) journal entry engaging with the book we have just finished reading. These entries should be written informally – although I expect you to write using complete grammatical sentences, you should not be composing formal essays with polished beginnings, middles, and endings. Rather, jump into the material whenever something strikes you as provocative, problematic, or perplexing. Do not merely summarize the material or attempt to demonstrate your “mastery” of the text. Instead, **struggle** with it – the greater the struggle, the better the journal entry.

Please note I am using the term “struggle” in the broadest and most positive sense possible. That is, you should not limit the focus of your journal entries to aspects of the material that you found difficult to comprehend, but should more generally (and more importantly) discuss things that challenged your customary beliefs and perceptions, that sparked new questions in your mind, that led to new insights or even inspired you in some way, that raised red flags for being logically inconsistent or factually incorrect, or that otherwise prompted a strong reaction from you. In other words, do not simply treat the term “struggles” as being synonymous with “confusions.”

(And to the extent that you do write about confusions you had with any given text in your journal entries, the struggles you describe should be deep as opposed to shallow ones. For example, if you simply write something like “I have no idea what Freud was getting at in Chapter 1 of *Civilization and Its Discontents*” without saying anything else about the chapter, this hardly suggests much effort on your part in trying to work out possible interpretations of the material. Likewise, if you come across an unfamiliar word, concept, reference, or allusion in any of the assigned readings, you should try doing a web search for clarification before citing it as a point of confusion. The bottom line here is that you should treat every initial roadblock to comprehension as an invitation to further thinking and learning, rather than as an excuse to check out until the going gets easier.)

Every time a journal entry is due, there will be two journal responses due three to four days later. These responses should be substantial (**300 words minimum, no maximum**) engagements with the journal entries you receive from the two other members of your peer-responded journal group. In these responses, you should spend little time praising – and no time condescending to – either the journal entry or the journalist. Instead of making judgments, grab on to some of the points raised by the journalist and further the discussion. Once again, no formal beginning, middle, and ending is expected or desired. In all of your responses, please speak directly to your classmates – that is, do not refer to them in the third person. I will be reading everything you write, but you are each other's primary audience. And yes, you should read the responses you receive from the other members of your journal group – and you can reply to these responses whenever you would like to turn a discussion into a conversation.

No individual journal entry or peer response will be graded, but an overall grade will be given for your entire set of entries and responses. You will not be scored in terms of "getting the right answers," as there is no such approved list for any of our books. To receive a high grade for your efforts, do the following on a regular basis:

1) **Produce a sufficient quantity of relevant writing in a timely manner.** (If you do this, it will be hard to get less than 24 out of 40 points.)

2) In addition to (1) above, **struggle, be engaged, open up, and deal with the difficult.** That is, along with describing the sections of the book that struck you as provocative, problematic, or perplexing, discuss **why** you found these sections provocative, problematic, or perplexing – and how you attempted to come to grips with the material. And refrain from simply rehashing your original entries in your peer responses. (If you do these things, it will be hard to get less than 28 out of 40 points.)

3) In addition to (1) and (2) above, **demonstrate significant improvement from the beginning of the semester to the end.** (If you do this, it will be hard to get less than 32 out of 40 points.)

4) In addition to (1), (2), and (3) above, **demonstrate intellectual imagination.** In other words, extend your thinking beyond the covers of the book, and try to approach the material in nonobvious yet illuminating ways. And write your peer responses in the spirit of collaborative exploration. (If you do these things, it will be hard to get less than 36 out of 40 points.)

5) If you want to receive the maximum number of points possible for the peer-responded journal, **do all of the above in the extreme**, which will typically require you to go well beyond the minimum word counts. And keep in mind that the best submissions will grapple in some way with the "big picture" being painted by the author(s) of the book.

Detailed instructions for how to submit your journal entries and peer responses will be posted on Blackboard during the second week of class.

Homework Assignments. Six homework assignments will be due this semester, all of which will be made available to you on Blackboard via the Homework Assignments page. As often as not, these assignments will ask you to extend whatever psychological perspective we have been considering to a new set of ideas or observations, and they will typically require you to read one of the articles from our Additional Readings page. Each of the six homework assignments is worth 5 points, for a combined total of 30 points. Homework due dates can be found in our course schedule. Every assignment will be posted at least one week in advance of when it is due. **Late homework assignments will not be accepted.**

Please note that each homework assignment must be completed using APA style. Guidelines for formatting and submitting these assignments can also be found on the Homework Assignments page.

Panel Discussion. Once during this semester, you and two or three of your classmates will be assigned to a panel to discuss the book we have just finished reading in front of the rest of the class. A few days in advance of each panel discussion, a short list of questions about the material (and the psychological

perspective it represents) will be announced on Blackboard. Acting in the role of moderator, I will pose these questions to the panel at appropriate points during the discussion. The panel members will take turns responding to these questions, and are encouraged to engage with one another (in a civil manner, of course) whenever differences of opinion emerge.

Each panel discussion will be divided into two parts. For the first 40 to 50 minutes, the discussion will primarily be between panel members. For the next 20 to 30 minutes, the discussion will open up to include the rest of the class, who can then offer their own opinions or pose their own questions to the panel. All of this will take place virtually, of course, during one of our synchronous meetings.

Please keep in mind that a panel discussion is typically defined as discussion of a particular topic by a small number of speakers in front of an audience. Given this, you should treat the first part of your panel discussion as a focused conversation between yourself and your fellow panelists. In other words, you should be talking mostly to each other, rather than directing all of your responses at the moderator (me) or at the rest of the class. Of course, all bets are off when we open things up during the second part of the panel discussion.

I realize that it can be difficult to publicly hold forth on a topic that you have only recently begun to grapple with. And it would be unreasonable to treat every member of a discussion panel as an “expert” on the assigned text. But your panel discussion can and should extend beyond the covers of the book. Each of you has a wealth of personal experiences – and probably some long-held beliefs about human nature (which you should continuously reexamine as you progress through this course) – that can potentially be related to the material you are discussing. Moreover, I have little doubt that all of you have read and talked about theories and findings in other courses here at GVSU that can be brought to bear on any of the psychological perspectives being explored in this class. I encourage you to cast a wide net as you prepare for your panel discussion, and to refer to things that you have observed, felt, done, and learned in other contexts as you react to the assigned text.

Your panel discussion is worth 10 points. Panel assignments will be posted on Blackboard during the second week of class.

Capstone Forum. The psychology capstone is traditionally conducted as a seminar course in which discussion is emphasized over lecture. And while many of our discussions will occur during our synchronous meetings, we will also engage in a wide range of asynchronous conversations through the semester. The Capstone Forum will be our venue for these conversations. You can link directly to this forum from our Blackboard menu.

The Capstone Forum should be used to discuss the films we will be watching, and I would like everyone to demonstrate via this forum that they have engaged with each of our six assigned movies. But there are many other things that the Capstone Forum is suited for, such as:

- continuing conversations that began during our virtual class meetings
- discussing and debating assigned articles that were not covered in our meetings
- bringing new observations, ideas, and questions to the table that can be used to further explore the relationship between self and society

I will sometimes take the lead in sparking these conversations, but I expect everyone to start a few meaningful discussions themselves by creating threads of their own at various points.

You should make at least 60 thoughtful and substantial contributions to the Capstone Forum between now and the end of the semester. This works out to an average of four contributions each week. That being said, please do not adopt a bean-counter mentality when it comes to this activity – that is, don’t just make your contributions with the mindset of simply reaching the required number of posts. Instead, you should actively read what other people are posting each week, consider replying to replies (and not just to the original thread submissions), and do your best to answer questions that others may raise in reaction to your own contributions in a timely manner. In other words, I’d like to see our threads

generate some real conversations rather than devolve into a series of call-and-response exercises. Make sense?

Oh, and please feel free to have some fun with the Capstone Forum! For instance, adding a little humor here and there is always welcome. And if you can use some of your contributions to help us get to know you better, I encourage you to do so.

The Capstone Forum is worth 20 points, and if you satisfy the above requirements and honor the spirit of this forum throughout the semester, you will receive full credit.

If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard discussion forums, a short tutorial can be found at <https://www.gvsu.edu/elearn/help/blackboard-using-the-discussion-board-53.htm>.

Students with Disabilities

If anyone in this class has special needs because of a cognitive, physical, or other disability, please let me know, and contact Disability Support Resources (DSR) at (616) 331-2490. Although students with disabilities are held to the same academic standards as all other students, accommodations will be provided as appropriate.

GVSU Policies

This course is subject to all of the GVSU policies regarding enrollment, grading, academic integrity, and fairness listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unless otherwise stated, all of our class meetings this semester will run from 2:30 to 3:45 p.m.

Introduction

January 19 **Virtual class meeting:** Overview of course.

January 21 Before class, read “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and “Is Stupid Making Us Google?”
Virtual class meeting: Learning in the digital era – a preliminary conversation.

SELF AND SOCIETY, PART ONE: CLASSIC CONCEPTIONS

The Psychodynamic Perspective (and Some Questions About Psychology)

January 25 –

January 28 Read “Some Key Differences Between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life.”
Watch *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.

January 29 Finish reading *Civilization and Its Discontents* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

February 2 Before class, submit your journal responses.
Virtual class meeting: Panel discussion of *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

February 3 Homework 1 (“Social Psychology as History”) is due by midnight.

February 4 Before class, read “Science as Falsification.”
Virtual class meeting: Further considerations.

The Behaviorist Perspective (and the Utopian Impulse)

- February 8 –
February 11 Read “Culture and Social Behavior.”
Watch *The Ballad of Narayama* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.
- February 12 Finish reading *Walden Two* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- February 16 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Panel discussion of *Walden Two*.
- February 17 Homework 2 (“Psychology, Ideology, Utopia, and the Commons”) is due by midnight.
- February 18 Before class, read “Religion and Intragroup Cooperation.”
[Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

The Existential Perspective (and the Evolution of the Self)

- February 22 –
February 25 Read “Defending Darwin.”
Watch *It’s Such a Beautiful Day* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.
- February 26 Finish reading *The Birth and Death of Meaning* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- March 2 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Panel discussion of *The Birth and Death of Meaning*.
- March 3 Homework 3 (“First we invented stories, then they changed us”) is due by midnight.
- March 4 [Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

The Shape of Things to Come?

- March 5 Finish reading *The Lathe of Heaven* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- March 9 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Open discussion of *The Lathe of Heaven*.
- March 11 Before class, read “The Biophilia Hypothesis and Life in the 21st Century” and “The Empathy Paradox.”
[Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

SELF AND SOCIETY, PART TWO: RECENT PROPOSALS

The Dispositional Perspective (and Bedrock Social Dilemmas)

- March 15 –
March 18 Read “The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories.”
Watch *Network* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.
- March 19 Finish reading *Predisposed* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- March 23 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Panel discussion of *Predisposed*.
- March 24 Homework 4 (“E Pluribus Unum”) is due by midnight.

March 25 Before class, read “Above and Below Left-Right.”
[Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

The Cultural Perspective (and the Grammar of Human Relationships)

March 29 –
April 1 Read “Culture’s Constraints.”
Watch *Moolaadé* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.

April 2 Finish reading *Virtuous Violence* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

April 6 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Panel discussion of *Virtuous Violence*.

April 7 Homework 5 (“Microaggression and Moral Cultures”) is due by midnight.

April 8 [Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

The Cognitive Perspective (and the Limits of Folk Sociology)

April 12 –
April 15 Read “A Terror Management Analysis of the Psychological Functions of Religion.”
Watch *Waltz with Bashir* and start discussing it in our Capstone Forum.

April 16 Finish reading *Minds Make Societies* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

April 20 Before class, submit your journal responses.
[Virtual class meeting](#): Panel discussion of *Minds Make Societies*.

April 21 Homework 6 (“Wisdom in Context”) is due by midnight.

April 22 [Virtual class meeting](#): Further considerations.

Robots in the Mist

April 26 Finish reading *Speak* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

April 29 (2:00 – 3:50 p.m.) Before class, submit your journal responses.
Before class, read “What Happened to the Girls in Le Roy?” and “In Good Company?”
[Virtual class meeting](#): Open discussion of *Speak* and closing thoughts.